

2025 MPA Better Newspaper Contest



Statewide Contest Spotlights Quality Journalism

Members of the Arkansas Press Association reviewed 319 entries submitted by 12 Michigan News Media members this year. The competition inspires all journalists to produce their best work, which in turn nurtures stronger communities.

“The annual Michigan Press Association Better Newspaper Contest gives our members a chance each year to assess and put forth their team’s best work in journalism, photojournalism, column writing, graphic design and advertising. After the judges have reviewed the thousands of submissions and made their decisions, awards will be given, bragging rights established and perhaps a few toasts made to the winners. It is a rare moment in our profession where we allow ourselves to reflect and experience something akin to satisfaction for a job well done. Anyone in this business today is in it, not for kudos, but because of a passion and desire to serve our readers, our advertisers and our communities. For us the work is the reward. But on the occasion of MPA BNC contest awards, let’s take a moment to say to all our coworkers and all our colleagues — Good job! And to the winners — Congratulations!”

— Wes Smith, Michigan Press Association Past-President and Group Publisher of View Newspaper Group

The 2025 “News Media Publication of the Year” award is presented to the top News Media publication in the Local and Statewide circulation classes based on points accumulated (100 for first, 70 for second and 40 for third) in all Editorial contest categories. Winners of those awards are listed below.

Circulation Class	News Media Publication
Local	Glen Arbor Sun Newspapers
Statewide	Bridge Michigan

The MPA Rookie Writer Award recognizes exemplary efforts of new writers just breaking into journalism. The three finalists are: Grant Schwab of Detroit News, Leah Craig of Michigan Advance and Cassidey Kavathas of Holland Sentinel, with the award going to **Cassidey Kavathas**.

The MPA Public Service Award recognizes a distinguished example of meritorious public service by a newspaper or newspaper individual that has made a significant contribution to the betterment of their community. Winners of those awards are listed below based on their circulation Class:

- News Media-Statewide: Bridge Michigan for “Crush of retirees a crisis in Michigan. State unprepared to meet their needs”
- News Media-Local: BridgeDetroit for “Reporting by Jena Brooker”

The 2026 MPA Better Newspaper Contest opens August 1, 2026.

Class 37 - Spot News Story

News Media-Local - Class 37 - Spot News Story

7 Entries

1st Place *The Betsie Current*

Disaster Averted - The importance of being prepared at Sleeping Bear Dunes

Aubrey Ann Parker

2nd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

American flags, strawberry rhubarb crisp, but No Kings

Jacob Wheeler

3rd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Police raid Twin Flames Universe home: Michigan AG announces investigation

Jacob Wheeler

Honorable Mention *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

"You may now sniff the bride"

Berry Kendall

News Media-Statewide - Class 37 - Spot News Story

12 Entries

1st Place *Michigan Advance*

Protesters clash with U of M police during demonstration on anniversary of Oct. 7 Hamas attack

Jon King

2nd Place *Gongwer News Service*

Whitsett denunciation of Tate captivates Capitol, kneecaps

Democratic majority

Elena Durnbaugh

3rd Place *Bridge Michigan*

MSU loses millions in agriculture, higher ed grants as Trump slashes USAID

Lauren Gibbons

Class 38 - News Enterprise Reporting

News Media-Local - Class 38 - News Enterprise Reporting

10 Entries

1st Place *Crains Grand Rapids Business*

Great Lakes region readies for its role in a nuclear energy revival

Andy Balaskovitz

2nd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Trump's mass deportation threat worries Leelanau's tight-knit Latino community

Jacob Wheeler

3rd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

From Black Eden to Migrant Prison: ICE's second largest detention center nationwide opens in Baldwin

Jacob Wheeler

News Media-Statewide - Class 38 - News Enterprise Reporting

13 Entries

1st Place *Bridge Michigan*

The 'day of death': How a mystery drug, spate of ODs changed west Michigan

Robin Erb

2nd Place *Chalkbeat*

How fears of violence shape life for Detroit youth

Allison Torres Burtka

3rd Place

Fentanyl came to a tiny UP town. Then the funerals began

Ron French

Honorable Mention

A Black man says officials in Howell, Michigan, targeted him after he confronted white supremacists

Jon King

Michigan Advance

Class 39 - Government/Political News

News Media-Local - Class 39 - Government/Political News

11 Entries

1st Place *Crains Grand Rapids Business*

Ottawa Impact derails \$51M housing project by taking stand against incentives

Rachel Watson

2nd Place *Mackinac Island Town Crier*

2025.05.31 Mackinac Policy Conference Addresses State of Housing

Josephine Anderson

3rd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Leelanau Energy task force boasts big goals: Commissioner Lautner pushes back

Jacob Wheeler

Honorable Mention *Mackinac Island Town Crier*

Demonstrators Rally on MI Against Line 5

Victoria Smith

Class 39 - Government/Political News

News Media-Statewide - Class 39 - Government/Political News

22 Entries

1st Place *Michigan Advance*

As Ted Nugent rails against Michigan wildlife regulations, Dems call hearing 'absurd' and 'shameful'

Ben Solis

2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*

Kwame Kilpatrick: I went to 'work' to elect Trump after he 'promised' a pardon

Simon Schuster

3rd Place *Gongwer News Service*

In Howell, A KKK Grand Dragon's Legacy Overshadows Progress

Lily Guiney and Nick Smith

Honorable Mention *Bridge Michigan*

Who funds Michigan lawmakers? Most get cash from PACs, not voters they represent

Simon Schuster

Class 40 - Education/School News

News Media-Local - Class 40 - Education/School News

6 Entries

1st Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Stripped of safe haven status, local schools face immigration enforcement threat

Jacob Wheeler

2nd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

National nutrition education program with local impact slated for elimination by Congress

Jacob Wheeler

3rd Place

Crains Grand Rapids Business

Corewell Health's \$19M program at GVSU helps ease nursing shortage

Mark Sanchez

Honorable Mention

BridgeDetroit

Advocates fight for Detroit educators to follow IEPs for special education students

Micah Walker

News Media-Statewide - Class 40 - Education/School News

18 Entries

1st Place

Gander Newsroom

Meet Gemini: The dog keeping students safe in Williamston Community Schools

Lucas Henkel

2nd Place

Gander Newsroom

An after-school program in Southwest Michigan is shining a 'light' on the mental health of students

Lucas Henkel

3rd Place

Michigan Advance

Michigan Republicans allude to dismantling Department of Education in fiery hearing

Ben Solis

Honorable Mention

Chalkbeat

Michigan education

Hannah Dellinger

Class 41 - Business News

News Media-Local - Class 41 - Business News

10 Entries

1st Place

Crains Grand Rapids Business

Food & Drink West Michigan butchers face tough choices as beef prices soar

Abby Poirier

2nd Place

Crains Grand Rapids Business

The namesake behind an iconic toy company says he's been wiped from history. He wants his due.

Elizabeth Schanz

3rd Place

Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper

Passing the Whisk: Inn and Trail changes hands, but keeps its heart

Berry Kendall

Honorable Mention

The Betsie Current

Small-Town Grocery - Outsized community role

Keith Schneider

News Media-Statewide - Class 41 - Business News

10 Entries

1st Place

Michigan Advance

Michigan braces for fallout as Trump tariffs target state's top 3 trading partners

Jon King

2nd Place

Bridge Michigan

Crypto mines a noisy nuisance to some. Should Michigan regulate them?

Justin Hinkley

3rd Place

Gongwer News Service

Michigan's marijuana market is flooded, but that keeps the Buckeyes coming back

Elena Durnbaugh and Dustin Ensinger

Honorable Mention

Bridge Michigan

Grayling strives to blend jobs, bombs, beauty as munitions plant takes shape

Paula Gardner

Class 42 - Agriculture News

News Media-Local - Class 42 - Agriculture News

7 Entries

1st Place

Crains Grand Rapids Business

Michigan migrant farm labor wages drop for 2025. Here's what it means for struggling farmers.

Abby Poirier

2nd Place

Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper

Saving cherries, saving farms

Jacob Wheeler

3rd Place

Crains Grand Rapids Business

Tariff threats leave Michigan's \$1.7B in agricultural exports in limbo

Abby Poirier

Honorable Mention

Crains Grand Rapids Business

Egg-laying hens will have more breathing room in 2025. How will food costs change?

Abby Poirier

News Media-Statewide - Class 42 - Agriculture News

11 Entries

1st Place

Michigan Advance

Enviros cheer Michigan Supreme Court upholding tighter permitting rules for factory farms

Kyle Davidson

2nd Place

Bridge Michigan

Michigan farmers facing 'uncertain future' amid funding freezes, tariff tensions

Lauren Gibbons

3rd Place

Bridge Michigan

Singapore owns 5% of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Its wealth fund bet on timber

Simon Schuster

Honorable Mention

Gongwer News Service

Biosolid or wastewater?

Elena Durnbaugh

Class 43 - Feature Story

News Media-Local - Class 43 - Feature Story

14 Entries

1st Place

Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper

Childless locals care for Leelanau's future

Abby Chatfield

2nd Place

The Betsie Current

Soaring High - Green Point Flyers sustain local tradition of motorless flight

Bree McGregor

3rd Place

Mackinac Island Town Crier

Fifty Years Douds Mayoral Leadership

Josephine Anderson and Victoria Smith

Honorable Mention

The Betsie Current

Have You Seen This Fish - Help needed to locate the "40s Fish"

Aubrey Ann Parker

News Media-Statewide - Class 43 - Feature Story

9 Entries

1st Place *Bridge Michigan*

In Michigan's north woods, a search for Bigfoot and political common ground

Ron French

2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*

'Wind phones' give those in grief a connection to lost loved ones in Michigan

Robin Erb

3rd Place *Michigan Advance*

Native American Community in Lansing reaffirm union on the traditional Spring Feast

Erick Diaz Veliz

Honorable Mention *Michigan Advance*

A cultural bridge between Ecuador and the MSU community: The resilience of Kichwa language

Erick Diaz Veliz

Class 44 - Best Opinion

News Media-Local - Class 44 - Best Opinion

7 Entries

1st Place *The Betsie Current*

Leaving The Lights On - An essay on neighbors and nostalgia

Kendall Rose

2nd Place *The Betsie Current*

Beech trees, passenger pigeons, and the struggle to survive in Northern Michigan

Jess Piskor

3rd Place *The Betsie Current*

Northern Michigan Chaos Theory - An essay advocating for appreciative adaptation

Tim Mulherin

News Media-Statewide - Class 44 - Best Opinion

4 Entries

1st Place *Michigan Advance*

Michigan could pay bigly for Trump's trade war

Rick Haglund

2nd Place *Gongwer News Service*

Finding Election Results In Michigan Is A Nightmare

Zach Gorchow

3rd Place *Michigan Advance*

UAW's embrace of Trump tariffs could lead to disaster for its members

Rick Haglund

Honorable Mention *Michigan Advance*

The Resistance decides it's futile

Susan Demas

Class 46 - Best Columnist

News Media-Statewide - Class 46 - Best Columnist

1 Entries

1st Place *Gongwer News Service*

Weekender

Zach Gorchow

Class 47 - Best Newspaper/Publication Design

News Media-Statewide - Class 47 - Best Newspaper/Publication Design

2 Entries

1st Place *Bridge Michigan*

Mining rush brings hope, dread to Upper Peninsula, amid historic energy shift

Staff

2nd Place *Michigan Advance*

Michigan Advance

Nelle Dunlop, Goran Butorac, Jon King

Class 48 - Best Page or Pages Design

News Media-Local - Class 48 - Best Page or Pages Design

2 Entries

1st Place *Mackinac Island Town Crier*

Page Design TC 2025.07.07

Staff

2nd Place *Mackinac Island Town Crier*

Page Design MITC 2025.07.12

Staff

News Media-Statewide - Class 48 - Best Page or Pages Design

1 Entries

1st Place *Bridge Michigan*

Bridge Michigan Page Design

Staff

Class 49 - Special Section

News Media-Local - Class 49 - Special Section

1 Entries

1st Place *The Betsie Current*

Special September Issue

Staff

News Media-Statewide - Class 49 - Special Section

5 Entries

1st Place *Gander Newsroom*

The MichiGanja Report

Kyle Kaminski

2nd Place *Gander Newsroom*

Michigan Voting Guide 2024

Karel Vega

3rd Place *Michigan Advance*

Library Wars

Staff

Honorable Mention *Michigan Advance*

Decision 2024

Jon King, Nelle Dunlap, Mary-Kate Murphy

Class 50 - News Photo

News Media-Local - Class 50 - News Photo

2 Entries

1st Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Goodbye culverts, hello timber bridge over the Crystal River

Photo courtesy of Crystal River Outfitters

2nd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*

Inland Seas expands, announces fundraising campaign

Photo courtesy of Inland Seas

News Media-Statewide - Class 50 - News Photo

- 8 Entries**
1st Place *Michigan Advance*
Confrontation at Detroit's Clark Park
 Erick Diaz Veliz
2nd Place *Michigan Advance*
Protesters gather outside Rep. Barrett's Lansing office after vote to approve federal budget bill
 Erick Diaz Veliz
3rd Place *Gongwer News Service*
Senate falls asleep in middle of night on Senate floor
 Nick Smith

Class 51 - Feature Photo

News Media-Local - Class 51 - Feature Photo

- 3 Entries**
1st Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*
Bear crazy: DNR study seeks answers to human-bear conflict
 Photo courtesy of DNR
2nd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*
Fishing Day an annual treat
 Photo courtesy of Alan Campbell
3rd Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*
Oomen-Yamasaki collaboration features "Innocents in Peril"
 Taro Yamasaki

News Media-Statewide - Class 51 - Feature Photo

- 7 Entries**
1st Place *Bridge Michigan*
Mail in a Pail on the Detroit River
 Josh Boland
2nd Place *Michigan Advance*
Cast of 'Scandal' reunites in Michigan
 Andrew Roth
3rd Place *Michigan Advance*
Obama questions Trump's 'competence' during Detroit rally drawing 12K
 Andrew Roth

Class 53 - Sports Writing

News Media-Statewide - Class 53 - Sports Writing

- 5 Entries**
1st Place *Bridge Michigan*
Millions of walleye will soon head up the Detroit River
 Laura Herberg
2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Ice fishing as an Olympic sport? On a frozen Michigan lake, they dare to dream
 Laura Herberg
3rd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Michigan winter: No better time to jump in lakes? Why cold plunges are so hot
 Laura Herberg

Class 57 - Best Video Presentation

News Media-Local - Class 57 - Best Video Presentation

- 1 Entries**
1st Place *Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper*
Democracy in Leelanau: what unites us in politically divided times
 Justin Warnes, Jacob Wheeler

News Media-Statewide - Class 57 - Best Video Presentation

- 14 Entries**
1st Place *Bridge Michigan*
Tracking Governor Whitmer's Promises
 Asha Lewis
2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Riding the Silver Lake Sand Dunes
 Laura Herberg
3rd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Take a Look Inside the Better Made Factory in Detroit
 Janelle James
Honorable Mention *Bridge Michigan*
Michigan Spent Big to Fix Schools. Did it work?
 Isabel Lohman

Class 58 - Best Digital Presentation

News Media-Local - Class 58 - Best Digital Presentation

- 1 Entries**
1st Place *BridgeDetroit*
BridgeDetroit
 Bryce Huffman, Christine Ferretti, Laurén Abdel-Razzaq

News Media-Statewide - Class 58 - Best Digital Presentation

- 4 Entries**
1st Place *Michigan Advance*
Michigan Advance
 Nelle Dunlap, Goran Butorac, Jon King
2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Bridge Michigan's Digital Presentation
 Staff
3rd Place *Gongwer News Service*
Gongwer.com, news, information and bill tracking on Michigan state government and politics
 Staff
Honorable Mention *Gander Newsroom*
'Gander Newsroom On Instagram
 Staff

Class 59 - Public Service Award

News Media-Local - Class 59 - Public Service Award

- 1 Entries**
1st Place *BridgeDetroit*
Reporting by Jena Brooker
 Jena Brooker

News Media-Statewide - Class 59 - Public Service Award

- 7 Entries**
1st Place *Bridge Michigan*
Crush of retirees a crisis in Michigan. State unprepared to meet their needs
 Robin Erb and Ron French
2nd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Great Lakes Whitefish in Crisis
 Kelly House
3rd Place *Bridge Michigan*
Michigan communities sit on \$90M meant to help drug users, Bridge finds
 Robin Erb and Ron French

Class 60-Environmental/Climate Change/Weather

News

News Media-Local - Class 60-Environmental/Climate Change/Weather News

5 Entries

1st Place **Glen Arbor Sun Newspaper**

Report from the Climate Change front line: Mud, grief, perseverance in wake of Hurricane Helene

Katey Schultz

2nd Place **BridgeDetroit**

With more hot days, Detroit students' learning and health suffers

Jena Brooker, Katie Worth

3rd Place **Mackinac Island Town Crier**

2025 April - May Recovery Mode

Kaleb Boyer and Alexis Rankin

News Media-Statewide - Class 60-Environmental/Climate Change/Weather News

8 Entries

1st Place **Bridge Michigan**

Mining rush brings hope, dread to Upper Peninsula, amid historic energy shift

Kelly House

2nd Place **Bridge Michigan**

What furor over drab Gaylord land says about Michigan's energy transition

Kelly House

3rd Place **Michigan Advance**

West Michigan lawmakers float plans to protect critical dunes from harmful development

Kyle Davidson

Honorable Mention **Bridge Michigan**

On Lake Michigan, a coal-fired steamship and ferry eyes a clean-energy future

Kelly House

Class 61-Crime/Justice News

News Media-Local - Class 61-Crime/Justice News

1 Entries

1st Place **BridgeDetroit**

Detroit said auto theft victims shouldn't pay fees. Some still are

Kayleigh Licklitter

News Media-Statewide - Class 61-Crime/Justice News

12 Entries

1st Place **Bridge Michigan**

Trump cuts hit Michigan violence prevention programs: 'This will cost lives'

Lauren Gibbons

2nd Place **Michigan Advance**

License plate reader searches by Grand Rapids PD point to need for guardrails, legal advocates say

Kyle Davidson

3rd Place **Michigan Advance**

Senate passes sexual assault statute of limitations extension; Hall noncommittal on House action

Ben Solis

Honorable Mention

Bridge Michigan

Brother: Walmart attack suspect a danger for years, 'fell through cracks every time'

Eli Newman

Class 62 - Best Podcast

Open - Class 62 - Best Podcast

6 Entries

1st Place **Gongwer News Service**

MichMash: County clerks on security, early voting in the 2024 general election

Zach Gorchow, Alethia Kasben, Cheyna Roth

2nd Place **Bridge Michigan**

Listen: Who's buried atop Michigan's tallest mountain?

Laura Herberg

3rd Place **BridgeDetroit**

Bridge Detroit's Detroit Next podcast

Bryce Huffman, Malachi Barrett, Khary Frazier

Honorable Mention **Grand Rapids Press**

Yes Michigan! - Start listening with The Feeling's Forever and hear a mystery solved.

Patrick Shea, Gillian Van Stratt

Class 63 - Best Writing

Open - Class 63 - Best Writing

33 Entries

1st Place **Bridge Michigan**

The 'day of death': How a mystery drug, spate of ODs changed west Michigan

Robin Erb

2nd Place **Detroit News**

Grim Reapers' teamed up to kill a Monroe woman after a wedding

Francis X. Donnelly

3rd Place **Bridge Michigan**

Iconic whitefish on edge of collapse as Great Lakes biodiversity crisis deepens

Kelly House

Honorable Mention **Detroit News**

For Lions' Kalif Raymond, a life's work finds a home in Detroit

John Niyo

Class 64 - Best Headline

Open - Class 64 - Best Headline

39 Entries

1st Place **Grosse Pointe News**

Ambulance beef lacks meat

Brad Lindberg

2nd Place **Bridge Michigan**

AWWHELL no: See which license plates are 2DAMFUN for Michigan Staff

3rd Place **Gander Newsroom**

Protecting what's under the hard hat: MI's construction workers are talking about mental health

Lucas Henkel

Honorable Mention **Flint Journal**

Good gourd, almighty! Michigan man surprised after pumpkin picture lands on soda label

Jake May

Class 65 - Best Photo

Open - Class 65 - Best Photo

19 Entries

1st Place **Michigan Advance**

Harris vows to end war in Gaza during final Michigan rally at MSU

Andrew Roth

2nd Place **Detroit News**

St. Brown Headstand

Daniel Mears

3rd Place **Flint Journal**

Boxers fly out of ring

Jake May

Honorable Mention **Livingston County Daily Press & Argus**

White Supremacists in Livingston County

Adam Vander Kooy

Class 66 - Most Innovative Story Telling

Open - Class 66 - Most Innovative Story Telling

10 Entries

1st Place **Detroit Free Press**

We asked 100 Michiganders about Trump's first 100 days: Here's what they said

Detroit Free Press Staff

2nd Place **The Ann Arbor News**

How will Ann Arbor's family-owned restaurants survive? Eyes are on the next generation.

Makayla Coffee. Jacob Hamilton

3rd Place **Detroit Free Press**

Detroit Lions fandom

Detroit Free Press Staff

Honorable Mention **Gander Newsroom**

Series: So What, Michigan?

Kyle Kaminski

Class 67 - Best Education Beat

Open - Class 67 - Best Education Beat

12 Entries

1st Place **Holland Sentinel**

Holland Education Coverage

Mitchell Boatman

2nd Place **Livingston County Daily Press & Argus**

Livingston County Education Coverage

Evan Sasiela

3rd Place **Petoskey News-Review**

Karly Graham

Honorable Mention **BridgeDetroit**

Micah Walker

Class 68 - Best Newsletter

Open - Class 68 - Best Newsletter

13 Entries

1st Place **Detroit Free Press**

Detroit Free Press Daily Briefing Newsletter

Leah Olajide, Elissa Robinson

2nd Place **BridgeDetroit**

City Council Notebook

Malachi Barrett

3rd Place

Lovable Michigan

Tanda Gmitter, Jamie Rewerts, Cara Hackett

Honorable Mention **Gander Newsroom**

That One Time In Michigan

Class 70 - Rookie Writer

Open - Class 70 - Rookie Writer

9 Entries

1st Place **Holland Sentinel**

Cassidey Kavathas

2nd Place **Detroit News**

Grant Schwab

3rd Place **Michigan Advance**

Leah Craig

Class 72 - Reporting on the 2nd Amendment

Open - Class 72 - Reporting on the 2nd Amendment

5 Entries

1st Place **Bridge Michigan**

Bridge Michigan 2nd Amendment Coverage

Staff

2nd Place **Gander Newsroom**

Lansing found a way to reduce gun violence. But the Trump administration is pulling the plug

Kyle Kaminski

3rd Place **Detroit Free Press**

Gunfire, explosions ring out from shooting range next to her home.

And nobody can help.

Paul Egan

Honorable Mention **Michigan Advance**

Michigan Senate Democrats advance bump stock ban, ghost gun serialization bills from committee

Ben Solis

Class 73 - Community Impact Award

Open - Class 73 - Community Impact Award

2 Entries

1st Place **BridgeDetroit**

BridgeDetroit election initiative

Staff

2nd Place **Leelanau Enterprise**

Community Impact

Staff